

**THE HOUSE AGRICULTURE SUBCOMMITTEE  
GENERAL FARM COMMODITIES AND RISK MANAGEMENT  
HEARING TO DISCUSS THE POTENTIAL EFFECTS OF MISSOURI  
SPRING RISES ON CROP INSURANCE POLICIES.  
TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 28, 2006**

**STATEMENT FOR THE RECORD  
SEN. JAMES M. TALENT**

Mr. Chairman, thank you for holding this hearing today and welcome to Missouri. I am sorry that I can not be with you in Jefferson City.

As you know, the Missouri River is the longest river in the United States and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (Corps) operates the Missouri River to serve several Congressionally-authorized purposes including flood control, navigation, irrigation, hydropower, water supply, recreation and fish and wildlife.

The Missouri River is complicated to manage even when water is plentiful, but it is extremely complex when flows are limited. This debate has spawned many court cases and legislative battles. For decades, I have been fighting on behalf of the downstream interests against the spring rise, which brings us here today.

The spring rise is extremely dangerous in that water released from the lowest reservoir (Gavins Point) takes about ten days to reach the confluence with the Mississippi River. Between the release point and St. Louis, there are no locks and dams that could slow the water's progress. In fact, twice in June of 2005, during a terrible drought season, the Missouri river rose 9 feet in a period of 18 hours. During spring months, the lower basin receives significant rainfall and the additional flows will reduce drainage from highly productive cropland and increase the probability of flooding. The floodplain includes 1.4 million acres of farmland, 30,400 homes and 5,345 buildings worth an estimated \$17 billion.

Additionally, I question the science behind the spring rise. Even the United States Geological Survey (USGS) admits that little is known about the essential life history needs of the pallid sturgeon and flow is just one of many factors that impacts spawning. Other variable stimuli thought to be associated with the spawning event including: temperature, photoperiod, and physiological conditions. Clearly, the spring rise is unjustified and premature. More time is necessary to evaluate the alternative measures underway *and* more time is necessary for the USGS and other agencies to form a baseline of analysis to evaluate biological response to the various approaches.

I have always opposed the spring rise. Under the 2006 Annual Operating Plan recently released by the Corps, farmers are now facing not one, but two spring rises; a March rise and a May rise.

For generations, local farmers, residents and businesses have depended on the river for their lives and livelihoods. The two spring rises proposed by the Fish and Wildlife Service put their livelihood at risk. Missourians understand they have a special responsibility to be good stewards of the River and to use its resources in an environmentally-sensitive way, and I certainly agree. However, I do not believe that needs of Missouri farmers and the Missouri economy should play second fiddle to a fish.

Furthermore, the Risk Management Agency recently announced that those landowners flooded under this proposed plan, shall not be eligible for crop insurance benefits because it is a man-made disaster, rather than a “naturally-occurring event.” It is outrageous that producers would not get the compensation that they need and deserve. I will continue to work with my colleagues and stakeholder groups to ensure that farmers who fall victim to spring rise flooding are compensated.

I continue to oppose the management of the Missouri River which has shifted the primary purpose of the upstream dams and reservoirs towards recreational and environmental goals at the expense downstream interests such as: flood control, navigation and water availability for community public water supply and power generation. This dangerous alignment of priorities on the Missouri River will also have an immediate impact on the livelihood of farmers and landowners along the River as well as the economy of the State of Missouri.

Again, I thank you for your interest in this important issue.